

Willis T. Richie, Jr.

The Honorable Judge Madeline Hughes Haikala
Judge, United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama
Hugo L. Black United States Court House
1729 5th Avenue N, Room 319
Birmingham, AL 35205

Reference: Case No. 5:63-cv-00109-MHH, Hereford vs. Huntsville Board of Education

Dear Judge Haikala:

I am a relatively new resident of Huntsville, and semi-retired from pastoral ministry. Education, at all academic levels, has always been a major concern of mine, and my pastoral ministry has afforded me opportunities to be involved in the selection of local public school administrators, the funding and execution of community based scholarship programs and funds, as well as serving in campus ministries at The Ohio State and Montclair (NJ) State Universities. I have also had the joy of substitute teaching in school systems in Howard County, MD, as well as Madison County, Al, and currently serve as instructor in theology, church history, and other subjects at the Huntsville Bible College.

I wish to address the matter of transportation as it relates to the above case. The Huntsville City Schools (HCS) Proposed Consent Order states – page 79 of the document – “The Parties agree that they will file a joint motion with the Court requesting that the Court declare the District unitary regarding transportation.” I would ask the Court to consider not granting this request for Unitary Status for the transportation part of this case.

My concern is that, although the district has presented a “transportation plan,” that plan is but one part of the larger overall school desegregation issue, and until a solution is forthcoming that addresses the entire desegregation matter comprehensively, the granting of Unitary Status to some parts of a plan may cause problems in the future.

There are projected new schools, for example, that will be impacted by this transportation plan for which construction has not even begun. This means that there is no way to assess whether or not these facilities will be in compliance with the DOJ requirements relative to equality of facilities, teachers, programs, curriculum, etc. It would seem to me, therefore, that it would be premature, and perhaps even unnecessary to grant Unitary Status to the transportation portion of this proposal before its impact on the final product can be assessed.

The main issue, as I see it, is not "transportation per se." The main question is "What is at the end of the transportation process? What kind and level of educational experience awaits the student when he or she steps off that bus? Does it make a difference if they get off at a school in the northern versus the southern part of the district?" It should not, but in fact, it currently does, with the predominantly African American schools in the north apparently not offering programs and instruction equal to those found in southern area schools.

Until the HCS demonstrates to the Court an acceptable, fully fleshed out plan for desegregation, I would hope that Unitary Status would not be granted in a piece-meal fashion that could prove detrimental to the final outcome.

Respectfully,

(Rev) Willis Temple Richie, Jr.